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ABSTRACT

This is the first in a series of six monographs developed to help school district and building staff use and report Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test results. Determining the meaning and use of previous and current test results is a necessary part of a complete reporting process. The two major ways to use MEAP results are student remediation and school instructional planning. Test results should be part of a year-round reporting campaign which delivers a variety of school-related information to interested audiences and helps build credibility and support for the schools. The plan for reporting test results includes three types of reports: (1) a background report to prepare the audience to understand the results; (2) a simple and brief test results report which contains discussion of low or declining scores as well as high or improving scores; and (3) a follow-up report describing actions taken and decisions made. Testing can serve as a vehicle to both improve educational opportunities of students and communicate what is good about schools (as well as the school's commitment to change what isn't good) to important audiences. (BS)

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STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION!

USING AND REPORTING TEST RESULTS

MONOGRAPH #1

AN OVERVIEW

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MONOGRAPH #1

AN OVERVIEW

Written and Edited By:

Edward D. Roeber and Robert A. Carr

USING AND REPORTING TEST RESULTS IS A SERIES OF SIX MONOGRAPHS, DEVELOPED AND PRODUCED BY MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM STAFF TO HELP LOCAL EDUCATORS USE AND REPORT TEST RESULTS.

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INTRODUCTION

The staff of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) have developed procedures for helping school district and building staff use and report assessment results. Procedures and materials for using and reporting results at the district level, school building level, classroom level, and individual student level have been developed. The models for using and reporting test results are applicable to local districts throughout the State that are faced with the challenge of helping students do better on the MEAP test. These ideas came from observing schools that made use of the results, so they are based on realistic estimates of resources available locally.

ASSUMPTIONS

The use and reporting models are predicated on several assumptions. First, we believe that the MEAP test results should be used to help students learn. That is, we believe that what we test is important and local educators should teach students the skills which they have not already attained. Second, we believe that parents, taxpayers, board members, and other members of the public have a right to know about their schools. Therefore, measures of schools such as test scores should be provided to these groups in a context which helps them understand the meaning of the scores. Third, most local educators (teachers, administrators, counselors, and so forth) have little or no formal training in testing, and those who have had courses on testing were taught how tests are constructed and how to read test reports, not use the results in instruction. Fourth, without training, local educators

often find it difficult to use the test results. And, unsuccessful attempts to use results can lead to frustration and discouragement. Thus, training activities must be planned and they must be interesting and motivating with a clearly perceived potential for usefulness. And, motivation must be given to implement the training which is received. Such motivation can take many forms including both encouragement through positive inducements and avoidance of negative consequences. Fifth, there are simple ways of using test results which can be taught. That is, significant use of test results can be made by teachers and principals without much additional training and without dependence on outside experts. Finally, the use of the results by the teachers and the principal and the reporting of the results at the district level to parents, the school board, and media are very much interrelated.

RELATIONSHIP OF USING AND REPORTING TEST RESULTS

It may seem odd to talk about using and reporting test results as being interrelated. Yet, it is very difficult to provide a knowledgeable report of test results until some conclusions have been reached about the meaning of the test results. Part of the process of providing meaning to test results includes describing ways that previous test results have been used to identify needs for changes in curriculum and instruction which have helped to produce the current test results.

Descriptions of plans for the use of the current test results are an even more important part of a complete reporting process. For, the current test results cannot be changed. Only by describing the plans to use the test results can the audience for the report be assured that reasonable attempts are being made to resolve those problems noted from the current test results. Including a reasonable plan for addressing problems noted in the test results

as part of the reporting process can gain support for the district's efforts even though there may be dissatisfaction with the actual level of test results. However, in order to maintain such support, substantive efforts to use the test results to identify areas of possible curriculum or instructional change need to be made. Therefore, the processes which are selected should have a reasonable probability of being successful. This monograph series describes many ideas and procedures, both for using and reporting results, which have proven to be successful in local districts around the State.

USING TEST RESULTS--STUDENT REMEDIATION

There are two major ways to use MEAP results. The first is to use the results to help the students that are tested. Each MEAP test covers an important set of skills and these skills are realistic expectations for the students. Thus, the skills that students do not attain can provide a starting place for planning instruction. In order to do this most effectively, it is important to recognize that the instructional needs of students may not always be restricted to the skills that the student misses on the test. These may only be indicators of underlying instructional needs. Some local districts have expanded the identification process by developing materials that include "diagnostic" tests to determine needs. Instructional suggestions keyed to the different levels on which students may be operating and supporting instructional materials are often included as well.

Teachers can use the MEAP Classroom Listing and the Individual Student Reports to identify which skills each student, or group of students, needs help with, as well as which students need the most remedial help. Some schools have counselors or teachers consider what additional classes or instruction some students should have because their performance on MEAP tests showed

significant levels of need. Detailed information on using MEAP for helping the students tested can be found in Monograph #2.

USING TEST RESULTS--SCHOOL INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

The second way of using the test results is for curriculum review and instructional planning at the building level. Ideally, the building principal and all classroom teachers (at all grades) will participate as a building team. At the secondary level, teachers in subject areas other than mathematics and English (for example, science, social studies, vocational areas) need to be involved as well. A step-by-step process was developed in Michigan to guide school staffs in using tests for this purpose. One step in the process is the determination of which skills tested present the greatest instructional need. Another step is the identification of current instruction on these, and other important skills at each of the previous grade levels. All teachers, if not involved in the first step, need to be involved at this step. Surveys are used in this identification step. Survey responses may take the form of type of instruction for each skill, when during the school year the instruction occurs, what text and other materials are used to teach the skills and so forth. Another step is the determination of immediate, as well as longer term curriculum goals. While the entire staff need not actually make the decision, all staff should be involved in the goal setting process and in decisions about how to implement the selected goals. For the final steps, staff will determine what changes in instruction should be made, how and when these changes should be made, and how to determine if the changes were successful. If skills that students do poorly on are ones on which they have not received sufficient instruction, when should students receive additional instruction? When should the skill be introduced, taught for

mastery, and reviewed? Usually, these changes can be fit into normal instructional activities. On the other hand, for some skills instructional time can be reduced. If students are doing quite well, is too much time being spent in instructing these skills? If so, can some of this time be used for the needed additional (or other) instruction?

The major direct benefit of this process is that teachers and the principals will have established a plan to use the test results--a short-term plan for the students tested and a longer-term plan to modify curriculum to meet the needs of the students yet to be tested. Indirect benefits of this process include: a coordinated instructional plan articulated across grade levels and subject areas, a feeling of team participation among teachers, and increased communication among administrators, teachers, parents, and students. More information on using MEAP for curriculum review can be found in Monograph #3.

REPORTING OF RESULTS

Before an effective reporting plan can be developed, it is necessary to identify (1) who needs or wants the information you have, (2) what information should or must be reported, (3) what is the expected outcome of the reporting (that is, why is the reporting being done and what are the persons who are the targets of the reporting expected to do when they get the information), and (4) how can the information best be transmitted so that it will reach the target audience.

Developing a year-round reporting campaign which delivers a variety of school-related information (not just test results) to interested audiences using appropriate methods can help build credibility and support for the schools. With such a campaign, reporting of test results can, more easily, be presented as just one more important piece of information about the schools

rather than the sole piece of information which many parents and citizens see. Such a year-round reporting campaign may use the local media but could also include school newsletters, notes to parents, PTA meetings, open-house sessions for all citizens, special letters to all citizens, posters, announcements at sports or music events, etc.

Although such a broad, year-round reporting campaign is advisable and is recommended, a full presentation is beyond the scope of this monograph series. This series will cover the narrower topic of reporting test results to important audiences. Monograph #5 discusses reporting to the local school board and Monograph #6 discusses reporting to the public through the media.

When planning a campaign to use and report the test results, it may be useful to think in terms of the events which must be carried out. Appendix A shows some of the major events which may take place before, during, and after testing and how the activities associated with using the results and reporting the results are connected with each testing activity. By planning the use and reporting of test scores in advance, local school staff can more firmly tie the use and reporting together.

Once the school has determined how the results will be used, reporting the results makes more sense. Parents of students tested can be told by the classroom teacher what remedial instruction is planned. Parents of students not in the test group can be told how the school curriculum will be modified to improve student achievement. Citizens can be informed what the school is doing, how well the school is doing it, and what will be done to improve. This information is particularly of interest to school board members and other citizens.

The plan for reporting test results includes three types of reports. The first type of report is a background report which should present the

audience with information about the purpose of the testing program, how the results are being used and how the scores fit within the context of other information about the district or school. This type of report works well with a variety of audiences such as the school board, parent groups, other lay audiences, and the news media.

The purpose of this report is to prepare the group to understand the test results. Because testing is unfamiliar to most individuals, preparation is needed to understand the results. If scores are given out before the explanation is given, the group is less likely to hear and comprehend the message--their attention will be distracted by the numbers and questions about what they mean. Also, a message which is given twice (before and as scores are reported) is more likely to be heard and understood.

The background report should contain the basic facts of the assessment program and some sample test items. It might be interesting to administer a few sample test items to the group to give them a "realistic" idea of what the tests are like. Perhaps most importantly, the report should stress what has been and will be done with the results. This should be described in as concrete terms as possible, perhaps by having building teams report their plans for using results. Staff from some buildings that have been through the process of using results, described earlier, could be involved in the preparation and presentation of the report. Finally, the background report should conclude with the plan for the subsequent reports, so the groups know that more information will be coming and who will be receiving it.

The second type of report is the actual report of the test results. This report should be made in the simplest and briefest terms possible, emphasizing the use of audiovisual materials. Five key questions should

be addressed:

1. How did we do this year?
2. Did achievement improve over last year?
3. If so, why?
4. If not, why not?
5. What will be done to review and use the results?

It is as important (if not more so) to discuss low results or declining scores as high or improving scores. MEAP test results are public information, available to any person who requests them. Thus, if there are problems in the results, it is important to recognize that the negative story will get out, often through the media. Discussing the full set of test results, including strengths and weaknesses, and follow-up activities which are planned can often avoid the appearance that the district is "covering up" or ignoring problems in the test results.

The final type of report is the follow-up report. This report is used to inform the group of action taken or decisions made subsequent to the background report and the report of the results. This report may focus on specific curricula selected for review, results of this review process, new instructional activities implemented as a result of the review or special activities implemented as a result of testing--awards, summer remedial programs, and so forth.

More information on reporting to parents is contained in Monograph #4. Additional suggestions for reporting results to local school boards is found in Monograph #5 and reporting results to the public through the news media can be found in Monograph #6.

SUMMARY

The reporting of assessment scores is dependent on the use of the scores, but each activity reinforces the other. When professional staff take the

time to determine meaning of the scores, the resultant insight can form the basis of reports of results to many audiences. By increasing the level of knowledge of various professional and lay groups, support for the schools' instructional programs is increased. Thus, testing can serve as a vehicle to both improve educational opportunities of students and communicate what is good about schools (as well as our commitment to change what isn't so good) to various important audiences.

The activities for using and reporting test results which are presented in the other monographs in this series have been developed to be used by local educators. These activities were developed recognizing the constraints of time, money, and lack of training in test usage under which local educators typically must operate. Many of the most effective activities were originally developed by local educators and have proven to be successful.

For the sake of convenience, the suggestions about how to use and report test scores have been singled out and presented in separate monographs. However, this method of sub-dividing a coordinated team effort was adopted to point out the different responsibilities, goals, approaches, techniques, and procedures needed to implement a good use and reporting procedure. Each of the monographs presents one part of a larger process to use and report test results effectively.

USING AND REPORTING TEST RESULTS

MONOGRAPH SERIES

Number	Title
1	An Overview
2	Identifying And Addressing Student Needs
3	Identifying And Addressing Curriculum Needs
4	Reporting Test Results To Parents
5	Reporting Test Results To The School Board
6	Reporting Test Results To The Public

The monographs in this series are now available upon request from MEAP, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909. Quantities are limited to one copy per item.